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THE REDUCTION OF VIOLENT CRIME AND EQUALITY FOR WOMEN

Jim Hackler

Department of Sociology
University of Alberta

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Department of Sociology
University of Alberta

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ABSTRACT

It is not unusual for people to express an interest in the reduction of violent crime without recognizing a link with equal rights for women. This paper suggests links between the equality of women and the reduction of violent crime in the future. Central to the logic of this argument is the nature of the distribution of violent acts.

Most people assume that the distribution of the frequency of violent crime is described by a bi-modal curve which allows us to distinguish between minor, unimportant offenders and a distinct group of serious offenders. Thus, the target for many policies is the serious offender who falls under the smaller hump on the violent end of the continuum. In fact, this bi-modal distribution does not exist; therefore, policies based on it will not be fruitful. The larger group of minor offenders who represent the greatest number of violent acts is basically ignored. The distribution of violence is better described as a continuous skewed curve. Further, the shape of this curve remains constant and an effective policy to reduce violence would have to shift the entire curve to the left.

A more profitable strategy recognizes the desirability of reducing the more numerous acts of lesser violence rather than concentrating on the rarer cases of extreme violence. Since much of this violence is nurtured in family settings, policies that decrease stress in family settings would have a meaningful impact on violence in the future. This paper will argue that a number of issues relating to the equality of women are related to family violence and thus would have a long term impact on violent crime.

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The Reduction of Violent Crime and Equality for Women

LINKING VIOLENCE WITH EQUALITY FOR WOMEN

The expression of concern for the amount of violent crime in modern society is widespread. However, many who favour programs that would reduce violence do not see a connection with equal rights for women. When policy makers are faced with programs for reducing violent crime, suggestions for raising the family allowance or providing greater economic equality are viewed as changing the subject, as irrelevant to the issue at hand. The majority of people do not see a clear link between providing financial support for mothers, economic equality for women, and the reduction of violent crime. This paper tries to trace such a link and argues that policies directed toward economic equality would have a long range impact on violence.

There is little debate on the evidence that a great deal of violence occurs in a family setting. The argument to be made takes the findings from research on family violence as a point of departure (Walker, 1984; Kincaid, 1985; Pagelow, 1984; Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz, 1980; Fleming, 1979; Schechter, 1982). There are some disagreements regarding the impact of family violence on the behaviour of children raised in such families, but it is not necessary to resolve these minor debates in order to pursue the logic presented here. Nor will much time be spent debating the link between financially troubled families and the likelihood of family violence. Elliott Currie (1985: Ch. 4) and others deal with these questions quite effectively showing that economically disadvantaged families are more likely to produce children who will contribute to violent crime. My argument is with the response to these findings. The economic factors are frequently treated as "minor" problems which do not require an urgent response. We can appreciate the long range implications of the decrease in social support for families (Currie, 1987: 11–12), but those in policy making positions are under more pressure to respond immediately to dramatic forms of adult violence.

One can respond to violence with two types of policy decisions: the first focuses directly on serious violent crime. The second strategy

concentrates on factors that might lead to violent crime in the future. Policy makers are frequently preoccupied with attempts that do something to offenders. Unfortunately, these efforts rarely have much positive impact on violence. In fact, the consequences may be negative. At the same time policy makers neglect changes that, in the long run, would yield a greater return for the efforts and resources provided. There is a tendency to focus on those *persons* who commit violent acts rather than on the *conditions* that give rise to violence. This paper argues that it is difficult to legislate against violent crime, but structural changes that would decrease conditions leading to violence are more amenable to legislative change.

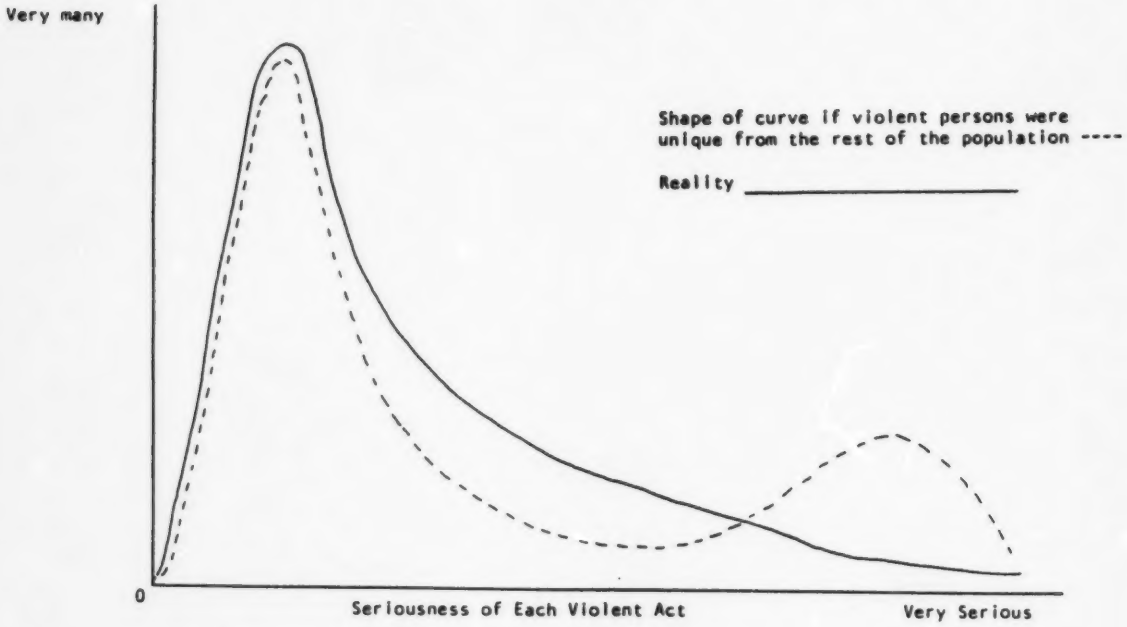
Before we can discuss appropriate policies, we must first examine the distribution of violent crime and ask where changes would have the greatest impact.

THE DISTRIBUTION OF VIOLENCE

A fundamental assumption in the following argument is that less serious crimes are more frequent than more serious crimes. This is fairly obvious to most people, and it has also been documented systematically for a variety of offenses, such as self-reported delinquency (Elmhorn, 1965). The various ways of measuring crime will influence the recorded distribution, but Uniform Crime Reports, victim reports, and self-report surveys show considerable agreement that serious offenses are less common than minor ones (O'Brien, 1985). Nettler (1984) summarizes crime patterns by noting that "behaviours guided by social norms tend to describe a unimodal (one-humped) graph that looks like a 'J' or an 'L' depending on how it is drawn"(p. 82). This type of distribution is shown by the curve in Figure 1 indicated by the solid line.

While empirical evidence for the greater frequency of less serious crimes is plentiful, less attention has been paid to the way society responds to rare events in contrast to common events. We tend to respond more vigorously to rare extreme cases than ordinary less serious events. Even though our jails are more likely to be crowded with the poor who have committed minor property offenses, the public outcry is more likely directed toward the Clifford Olsens who are rare.

FIGURE 1: The Frequency of Violent Acts Committed by the Total Population Charted Against the Seriousness of Each Violent Act*


Very many
Shape of curve if violent persons were unique from the rest of the population ----
Reality _____
0
Seriousness of Each Violent Act
Very Serious

* Basic idea from Whitehead and Smart (1972)

The exact shape of the curve depicted by the solid line in Figure 1 could be somewhat different for different types of crime and still be compatible with the argument presented here. The exact shape of the curve to the left of the hump of the solid line is unimportant for our purpose. It does not matter if there are a few people who are "almost perfect," which would mean the curve drops as shown in Figure 1, or if the left of the curve simply represents minor offenses with the curve continuing upward on the left side of the graph. Our interest is in the steady decline toward the right side of the graph. What is important is that crime does not take on a bi-modal distribution which has a second hump on the right, as shown by the dotted line in Figure 1. Violent crime does not increase in frequency as it increases in severity.

The recognition of these distributions and their implications for policy should be credited to those doing alcohol and drug research. The logic for the argument presented here is borrowed primarily from empirical work done by Canadian alcohol and drug researchers who note some previous work that has been done in France (Popham, Schmidt, and de Lint, 1976; Schmidt and Popham, 1978; Whitehead and Smart, 1972). They noted that drug use fit the pattern described above. Minor offenders were common. As the drug abuse became more serious, offenders were less frequent. If we lump all sorts of drug use together, it seems that many people drink coffee and ingest the occasional substance that is not very healthy. Relatively few, however, are hooked on heroin, alcohol, or smoke six packs of cigarettes a day. While the news media calls attention to different substances from time to time, the general phenomenon of drug abuse remains fairly stable: minor abusers are more common than serious abusers. However, we respond more to the serious abusers and tend to ignore the minor abusers. While this seems reasonable at first glance, a better policy might be to respond uniformly to all substance abuse. Let us apply this logic to violent crime.

CHOOSING THE APPROPRIATE TARGET

First, who are the logical targets of our efforts to bring about change? Typically we assume that the problem lies with a particular group of bad people. These violent individuals require our immediate attention. The rest of the population commit minor acts of violence from time to time, but because their acts are less serious they can be

conveniently ignored. In general, this large number of people who are "typical" is not seen as a serious problem. Their wrongs are numerous, but each individual act is seen as being of little consequence. Instead, public outrage is directed toward that special group of extreme individuals who commit serious crimes. We direct programs and laws against the *minority of serious* trouble makers rather than toward the *majority of minor* offenders. The central theme of this paper is that concentrating on the small number of people who represent the serious cases will not be as effective as attempting to achieve more modest changes among a larger population.

The curve with two humps

In figure 1, I have attempted to diagram the frequency of violent acts committed by the total population charted against the seriousness of each violent act. As one can see, the horizontal axis goes from "not serious at all" to "very serious". On the vertical axis, we have the number of people who are in that particular category of violent behaviour. If we look at the solid line, we see that the single hump of the curve is toward the left where a large number of people commit minor acts of violence. Most people occasionally spank their children; many children get into minor fights. There are relatively few completely non–violent people on the extreme left of the chart. People who do not step on insects and do not kick vending machines when they lose their money are rare. Most of us fit under the large hump. As we move out toward the right of the curve we have people who are more violent in a variety of ways. The main point is that the curve tapers off to the right with the more extreme behaviour being much less frequent.

If one looks at the *dotted line* in the figure, instead of the solid line, the shape of this curve might describe reality *if* those individuals who commit serious wrongs, that is the truly violent individuals, are unique and are truly different from the rest of us. The dotted line describes a curve which has two peaks, one on the right side of the chart in addition to the one on the left. Belief in this bi–modal curve can lead to a certain world–view. Most of us have no trouble with the peak on the left. The paragons of virtue are rare and most of us commit indiscretions that are not truly serious. The large group of people representing the hump on the left are not viewed as a problem. The *real* problem is with those who are

more dangerous. They are the ones who need special handling. This particular world-view assumes that we can tolerate the hump on the left, but we must somehow cut off that second hump to the right by some dramatic action. The basic flaw in this argument is with the *shape* of the curve and with the assumption that one can eliminate part of the curve without affecting the rest. Actually, the true curve is more likely to be represented by the *solid* line in the figure. *The implications of using one curve or the other*

Since there is no distinct and unique population of serious offenders who can be delineated as a logical target for a particular program, the Canadian alcohol and drug researchers mentioned above argued that drug policies were inappropriate because they were based on the two-humped curve. Programs designed to change the extreme drug abuser were common, but an effective policy would have to alter the *entire* curve. Thus, programs that would reduce the consumption of tobacco and alcohol among the majority would move the entire curve to the left. In other words, if one assumes the *shape* of the curve remains the same, efforts to change the behaviour of *large numbers* of people make more sense than efforts to change smaller select groups.

In the case of drugs, such changes may have taken place in parts of North America in recent years. Smoking has decreased in many areas. The light smoker may have contributed more to the change in smoking patterns than the heavy smoker. One could argue that this has moved the entire drug using curve to the left. The recent concern about smoking is related to more general concerns for good health. In addition, recent reductions in alcohol consumption seem to fit this general argument. Substance abuse may be seen as interconnected with general conditions influencing more than one specific behaviour.

I wish to utilize the same logic regarding links between family stresses and crime. Modest changes for many types of minor forms of violence would eventually influence the extreme behaviour of the few. The extreme and dangerous behaviours would be influenced by the conditions that influence violent behaviour in general.

Applying the same logic to crime, we should recognize that there is no distinct target population; serious offenders are simply at one end of a

smooth continuum. We could cut the curve at some arbitrary point and make those people the target of some anti-violence strategy. However, there is good reason to believe that the *shape* of the curve would remain constant, and efforts on that small population on the right of the curve will have little impact on the entire curve. In other words, the only way to reduce violence on the right side of the curve is to move the *entire curve* to the left.

The use of seat belts offers a useful analogy. Clearly, seat belt usage saves lives, but it also reduces minor injuries as well. The entire injury curve has been moved to the left. In this case, the serious injury was the target and the minor injuries the byproduct, but the important point is that increasing seat belt usage from 20% to 70% has a universal impact on injury.

Unfortunately, our public policies conceive of the violence problem in terms of the curve with two humps represented by the dotted line. We tend to ignore the group under the hump on the left hand side of the chart and focus instead on a theoretical distinct group on the right hand side of the graph. The incorrect assumption behind this second line of reasoning is assuming that we can deal with a small portion of the population while ignoring the rest. It may be possible to move the curve to the right or to the left, but there is no small, special population that can be treated in a unique manner while the rest of us continue going about our business as usual.

This is the logic I wish to apply to family violence. Instead of concentrating on extreme cases, my hope is to emphasize conditions that influence the entire curve. According to a number of researchers, some feminist issues are related to family violence (Tong, 1984; Atkins and Hoggett, 1984; Brophy and Smart, 1985). This research identifies specific situations which lead to violence, but my point is that the wide range of these issues taken together contribute to a wide range and considerable volume of violent crime. The evidence for some of the specific links suggested in the literature can be debated, but there is general agreement that feminist issues deal with areas related to stress and violence in the family.

FAMILY VIOLENCE AND FUTURE CRIMINALITY

Evidence that physical violence in families can influence subsequent criminal careers has been approached cautiously. White and Straus (1981) argue that this topic has been neglected for two reasons: First, the family is an institution which should provide love, supportiveness, and moral training. This makes it hard to view the family as an institution which teaches violence (Steinmetz and Straus, 1974). Second, most family violence is seen as legitimate, as in parental use of physical punishment or the high rate of pushing, shoving, slapping, and throwing things that occurs between spouses (Gelles and Straus, 1979). The acceptance of this violence tends to blind us to the possibility that it can not only train children to be violent but can also contribute to criminal behaviour.

White and Straus also explore the various mechanisms by which children are socialized into violent behaviour (1981). They conclude that such behaviour is *transferrable* from one setting to another. Child abuse, then, especially when it is a part of an eratic punishment pattern, teaches the victim that the world is not predictable or controllable. A child might learn that terror tactics and the invincibility of the bully are transferrable to other settings. Violence in the family becomes a training ground for violence outside the home. Let us examine some of the evidence related to these claims. First, we should distinguish between parents hitting each other and parents hitting their children.

The consequences of parents hitting children

The juvenile learns that violent behaviour is transferable from one setting to another partially because the rules transfer as well. The family is the setting where rules are first learned and reinforced. The rule that a marriage license is also a hitting license and the rule that members of the family can be physically punished "if they deserve it" are common. These rules are understood as norms of behaviour and can be applied to other social settings. In their national study of family violence, Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz (1980) found that the more the husbands and wives they studied were hit as children, the greater the rate of both mild and severe violence toward their own spouses. According to Lincoln and Straus (1985, Ch. 10) the more children are hit by their parents, the higher the rate at

which such children hit their brothers and sisters and their parents. It has been argued that such learning is not a general prescription for violence and would not necessarily lead to violence outside the family. However, Lincoln and Straus point to evidence that shows a clear link between being hit by one's parents and assaults on people outside the family, particularly for boys. One Canadian study produces similar findings (Jaffe, et al., 1985).

It is more difficult to show a direct *causal* relationship between violence in the family and future criminal behaviour, but the work by Joan McCord, in her analysis of the subsequent careers and life experiences of participants in the Cambridge–Somerville Youth Study is strongly suggestive (1979, 1981). She compared the assessment of home atmosphere with official records of subsequent criminal convictions. She found a clear relationship between the home atmosphere and subsequent serious criminality. In Canada, Ross found that children who had been beaten were more likely to injure themselves (1980).

Others have argued that the evidence is less convincing (Pagelow, 1984). In a recent review of the literature on early child abuse, neglect, and later violent crime, Widom (1986) notes that:

> While a number of researchers have suggested that aggression is a common outcome, other evidence indicates that withdrawal may be related to early abusive experiences. Most of the existing work in this area examines delinquent behaviour generally; few studies focus specifically on adult violent cirminal behaviour. Of those studies which examine violent behaviour the findings are contradictory. Some studies found more violent offenses committed by the abused delinquents, whereas others found no differences (p. 16).

The consequence of parents hitting each other and violence outside the family

Lincoln and Straus (1985) also report findings showing that boys growing up in families where there is physical fighting between parents were much more likely to be assaultive outside the family. Similarly, such boys were more likely to have higher rates of vandalism and higher overall delinquency scores. However, for girls there was no significant link between family violence and non-family delinquency.

It was somewhat surprising to find that adults who used violence against children were not more likely to be arrested for outside offenses. However, there was an association between a high rate of serious marital violence and the adults being arrested, particularly the wives. Lincoln and Straus use a victimization explanation to bring some of these findings together.

The unjust victim hyothesis

The role model of violent parents is probably a factor leading to violent crime, but why does it also lead to theft, vanadalism, and non–violent delinquency as well? Is there a link between being a victim and committing crime? Teenagers who have been assaulted by parents exhibit high rates of crime outside the family but *the parents* who carried out the assaults do not appear to be more criminal. In addition, Lincoln and Straus note that it is the *wives* in violent marriages, rather than the husbands, who have higher crime rates outside the family. Since the wives are the predominant victims of marital violence, even when they are violent toward their husbands, this is consistent with the victimization hypothesis. Victimization can lead to crime because it tends to undermine faith in the efficacy and fairness of the world that supports conforming behaviour. They have learned that the world is not a just place to live.

The link between violence in the family and violence as adults is not the main thrust of this paper. Rather, family violence represents a broad portion of the curve described in Figure 1. Even with disagreements on specifics, a modest reduction in family violence could have a broad reaching impact. The growing research in this area may force policy makers to recognize the importance of reducing family violence as a possible means of influencing other types of violence in the society, but it is less clear just *how* one can proceed.

In Canada, as in most countries of the world, serious violent crime is frequently a chance outcome from many situations with a potential for violence (Hackler and Gauld, 1981). The reduction of *potentially* violent situations should influence *specific* acts of violence. Instead of treating an imaginary hump on the right of our hypothetical violence curve, we would do better to concentrate on the single large hump on the left. In other words, small changes in the larger population would lead to shifting this

skewed curve to the left, thereby reducing the number of serious cases on the right. Efforts to help those with severe problems are still necessary, but changes which help *many people a little* might provide a better overall return. Directing attention to the larger number of potentially dangerous situations may in fact be the most effective way of reducing the severe cases of violence. Decreasing the dominance of men over women will be used as an illustration of a strategy which could lessen some of the strains which lead to family violence.

White and Straus (1981) and many others offer a number of strategies for rehabilitation. The danger, however, is that policy makers could utilize research on family violence in a manner that would not yield the best results. It is tempting to focus efforts on changing those families which have already been identified as severe problems. In other words, one could use the model of the world which fits the curve with two humps as described in figure 1. One could concentrate on prosecuting men who are severe wife batterers. While this may be appropriate in the specific situation, it should not distract us from focusing on economic factors, for example, conditions that make it difficult for women to leave a family situation that is under stress.

GOVERNMENT ATTITUDES TOWARD FAMILY VIOLENCE

Before proceding with my final argument, we need to examine the way policy makers respond to family violence. When Margaret Mitchell, member of Parliament in Canada, told the House of Commons that one out of 10 men regularly beats his wife, there were guffaws from some of the male members. Obviously, an initial task is convincing our predominantly male dominated policy making bodies that a problem exists. Beyond this there is the tendency to treat wife beating in isolation. The battered wife becomes the focus of attention. The wife beating problem becomes increasingly "medicalized," professionalized, individualized, and de-politicized (Conrad, 1975; Conrad and Schneider, 1980). The battered woman is given "therapy" and shown how to "identify tensions in the marriage relationship" (Tierney, 1982), as if *she* were the problem rather than the larger male-oriented values which influence social inequality.

Another element in this strategy, perhaps unintended, is that militant feminist groups which emphasize basic changes in the society can

be "cooled out" by sympathetic social service agencies and government projects that are willing to sponsor those programs which focus on a specific identifiable problem. Clearly, feminist movements need to rely on traditional institutions to keep specific programs operating, such as shelters for batterred women; however, Tierney (1982) points out that these traditional institutions have political structures and goals that may be antithetical to the larger, more militant movements.

The way in which governments respond to problems is a complex process, and understanding how problems are "discovered" and identified will influence the official response. Pfohl has pointed out that the discovery of child abuse was not attributable to an escalation of abuse itself (1977). Rather, there were organizational advantages to the medical profession which set in motion a process for labeling child abuse as deviant and in need of legislation. Similarly, there are advantages for different groups in the way certain family issues are labeled. A variety of social agencies have a vested interest in specific programs. My concern is that the dynamics of identifying problems and drafting legislation will lead to the selection of strategies that satisfy the needs of certain groups, many of which have very honorable intentions. Traditional social service strategies may focus only on a portion of the problem. This may be a meaningful contribution, but there is the danger that it would detract from the larger feminist movement that could move the *entire* violence curve to the left.

At this point I would like to shift the argument to various issues concerned with economic equality for women. There is little disagreement with the work that has been done in this area, but some recommendations would impinge on the skewed curve in different ways. My argument is for breadth rather than for a sharper focus.

WOMEN'S LIB AND MOVING THE SKEWED CURVE TO THE LEFT

The Canadian family allowance

Broad based programs which have a very small return for any individual family, may, in fact, be very significant for moving the entire crime curve to the left. The modest impact on many families may eventually have a meaningful impact on the most serious problems. Let me use the family

allowance in Canada as an illustration of a nationwide strategy which helps a little in many situations. In Canada, a family allowance is paid to mothers of young children. It is a universal plan which does not have a means test. Wealthy mothers receive a family allowance as well as poor mothers. While this amount must be added to their taxable income, one must admit that many families receive the allowance when they do not need it. On the other hand, the universality of the plan prevents some needy families from getting lost in the shuffle. One could also argue that some mothers buy booze instead of food for their children. While this may be true in some cases, there seems to be considerable evidence that the money is used to help children in the majority of cases. One could also argue that in some families the father is the more appropriate person to receive the family allowance. This is probably true, but statistically the mother is more likely to be the person caring for the children. The question of whether or not the mother is married is not relevant. The goal of the program is to provide universal support, admittedly at a low level, for children. This type of program makes a modest contribution toward the financial independence of women which may in turn decrease strains in families, make some women somewhat less dependent on their husbands, and decrease the likelihood that some women in a marginal position would have to go on welfare.

The Canadian family allowance is an illustration of an overall policy which attempts to avoid problems in advance. In the United States, there may be a tendency for families to struggle on their own, and *after* the family has failed, a variety of aid programs will come to the rescue. Currie argues that during the 1980s the United States has done poorly in helping marginal families nurture children and predicts more future crime as a result (1987: 11–12).

My argument would be that programs which wait for the problem to appear before taking action follow the logic of the curve with two humps. We separate the world into those who need help and those who do not. The attempt to draw a line between these two populations is unwise. Modest gains achieved from supporting families who are struggling, but not yet in great difficulty, could have an important payoff for society. The main theme of this paper is that one thrust of the women's lib movement involves the economic needs of women with children, which in turn is related to a variety of stresses in the family.

Recent data from an Alberta survey of wife battering is consistent with this argument (Kennedy and Dutton, 1987). This Alberta study showed that wife battering occurred about twice as frequently among the 18 to 34 age category compared to the older categories. While the study has not yet analyzed the data on these young couples, it is likely that young people with young children face more economic problems than those who are more established.

The Alberta study also showed that among those families earning less than $6000 per year wife battering reached 55%, however there were only 9 cases in that category. The 3 categories with incomes between 6000 and 45,000 did not show much difference in the percentage of wife battering (13.8%, 14.7%, and 13.8%), but those couples earning over $45,000 showed an incidence of wife battering of 7.5%. While the economic data are not overwhelming, financial support probably plays a role and thus provides some guidelines for policy. Are there ways to ease some of the strains that lead to family violence by providing funds in a judicious manner?

Using child support payments to move the curve to the left

The question of child support can be used to illustrate the same argument. In the family courts, we continually see cases where a mother is there because the husband has failed to make payments for the care of his children. Sometimes the husband is unemployed, but whatever the reason, the judge is frequently faced with the situation of trying to get money for child support when the father is facing financial difficulties as well. The needs of the children are not paramount in this whole process. Rather, it is sometimes a contest between two unco-operative individuals who are suffering in a variety of ways. Although a number of studies have targeted the laws in several countries as part of the problem (Atkins and Hogget, 1984; Brophy and Smart, 1985), the very fact that families must use the courts to solve problems adds pain to the situation. If instead, the state took on the task of paying child support and then collected from the husband, the situation would be quite different. For example, if a divorce settlement included child support payments, and the main concern of the court was the adequacy of the payments in terms of the needs of the children, instead of the ability of the husband to pay, the size of those payments might be different from the ones which are

awarded today. Once awarded, the state could guarantee that those payments would be made on a monthly basis.

The other side of the coin would be collecting those payments from the father. It is possible that an unemployed father would have difficulty making payments. But I would argue that this should be a contest between the court and the father, not between the mother and the father. Admittedly, there are those who argue that the state should not be involved in such family affairs. It is the obligation of the parents, and for those with a traditional orientation, the father in particular, to provide for the children; but in fact, we do not follow that logic. When the needs are great enough, welfare comes in and helps the family in trouble. My point is that we *create stresses* by waiting for the family to get into trouble. Situations such as divorces already involve tremendous amounts of stress. If this society is interested in minimizing the negative impact on the children, it would be desirable to make the mother of young children as independent as possible. Chasing a former husband through the courts in order to recover overdue child support payments is not the best way for a divorced mother to use her time or finances.

Such conditions also create the conditions for violence. A man wishes to see his children, but the mother says he isn't making payments so she denies access. Friction can potentially lead to violence. If payments were guaranteed, an ex-wife might even be sympathetic toward the plight of a former husband who is unemployed.

Policy makers sometimes claim that such practices would be impossible to legislate, but other countries have developed more reasonable strategies for dealing with this problem (Bridge, 1985: 23–27). Several Scandinavian countries have developed public maintenance advance systems that take into account salaries of parents and needs of the child, but the major point is that the child is somewhat protected from economic problems faced by the parents.

Our present situation penalizes the weakest people. Mothers of small children are the most vulnerable. Economic factors frequently make it difficult for a women to leave a potentially violent situation. Whether it is during a marriage or afterwards, society has a vested interest in enabling women to act independently and avoid stressful conditions.

TEACHING EQUALITY AND REDUCING AGGRESSION

In trying to relate the womens' liberation movement to crime, I am attempting to link many different steps. The last two decades have produced a variety of information on aggression against females (Davidson, 1978; Lacerte–Lamontagne and Mamontagne, 1980; Sunday and Tobach, 1985; Borkowski, Murch, and Walker, 1983; Bowker, 1983; Schechter, 1982; Fleming, 1979). There can be specific debates over many aspects of this research, but my argument is that some broader strategies relating to economic equality between men and women could be used to change some of the conditions that foster violence. These conditions become chronic and persist for long periods of time. While crash programs are appropriate at times, long term intervention is needed for many behaviour patterns. To illustrate, let us look at some of the evidence on aggression.

Huesmann, et al, (1984) point out that 8–year–olds who were more aggressive at the beginning of one study were also the more aggressive 30–year–olds at the end of the study. Thus aggessiveness seems to be a rather stable characteristic and is predictive of criminal behaviour, spouse abuse, and self–reported physical aggression. Eron (1980) argues that to reduce the level of aggression boys should be exposed to the same training that girls have traditionally received in our society and that they be encouraged to develop similar kinds of socially positive, tender, cooperative and sensitive qualities. In other words, if we treat boys more like girls they may be less aggressive. While Eron and his fellow psychologists are talking about specific socializing practices, they are consistent with a larger world–view and social policies that reduce the present dominance of men over women.

Girls who learn that mothers are unequal in a variety of ways may also accept unequal relationships in their dealings with father, uncles, brothers and males in general. The vulnerability of girls seems to contribute to their delinquency. Learning to "be a girl" has its negative side. Chesny–Lind (1983) points to research indicating that many young women who find their way into the juvenile justice system are actually victims of physical and sexual abuse. She summarizes the argument rather well by presenting evidence that:

> Possession of some traditionally masculine traits lowers female delinquency potential [and] possession of some traditionally female traits lowers the likelihood that males will engage in delinquency, particularly aggessive delinquency. Contrary to popular mythology, . . . freeing the sexes from the confines of narrow, stereotyped roles may actually prove to be an effective approach to delinquency prevention (1983: 39).

At other times feminists themselves can contribute to unwise policies by taking stands that are "anti-male." For example, Leslie Kennedy, in reporting on the Alberta study of wife battering mentioned above, points out that researchers are reluctant to report findings that point to the woman as the initiator of violence. The initiation of family violence comes from the female almost as frequently as it does from the male, but there is some pressure to blame males and ignore certain aspects of female behaviour. The *consequences* of family violence, of course, are much more devastating for women with the result being that women need protection. However, simply punishing men who batter wives is also a policy which follows the logic of the mythical curve with two humps. It focuses on extreme individuals when the reality is that couples, not just men, are frequently the source of the problem. Attempts to change violent men living in problem families usually requires long term intervention. Short term intervention may be required but should not be viewed as leading to basic change. The point is that finding someone to blame may be less effective in the long run than striving for laws that enable women to be independent.

Economic equality and the reduction of family stress

It is difficult to provide clear and specific evidence for the broad argument I am trying to make. Economic equality is something that can be influenced by policy makers, and it would influence a broader world view about how men and women relate to each other. When women marry, or live with a man, and bear children, they frequently lose economic power and independence (Atkins and Hogget, 1984: Chap. 1). The state could do more to balance that power, for example, by requiring that a portion of a breadwinner's salary is controlled by the homemaker. At present, housewives do not automatically have financial "worth."

Obviously, the state cannot dictate how families handle their money, but tax incentives could be used to give women more financial independence.

The details of these policies are not the issue in this paper. Rather, changes that would diminish economic differences between men and women and reduce the differences in socialization practices between boys and girls would also alter the balance of power and increase the ability of the woman to negotiate. This would increase the possibility of avoiding some situations that could be conducive to violence and have the potential for moving the violence curve described in Figure 1 to the left. If a modest change could be achieved among many families, this would also have an impact on the number of families who are on the extreme right of the continuum which produce violence.

Conclusion

Some authors have argued that womens' liberation has been accompanied by greater female involvement in traditional crime, including violence (Adler, 1975). The debate concerning changing female roles and their involvement in crime should not be confused with the ideas presented here. I am concerned with that aspect of the feminist movement which enables women to leave conflict producing situations and remove children from such circumstances. The link between the womens' liberation movement and the reduction of violence follows a sequence of steps. First, the connection between violence in the family and future criminality, including violent behaviour, has been supported by several research studies. A few have been noted earlier. A conventional response to this finding, however, could be to focus on those families who seem to be unique, those currently displaying violence. However, these families do not represent a distinct group which can be clearly identified. Instead, we are faced with a continuum of family violence with obvious illustrations as well as with many who are marginal. The pattern is like that represented by the skewed curve. Since the target group is unclear, the only truly effective strategy would include many who are viewed as marginal. Because of the volume represented by the more typical family, which faces minor stresses and experiences minor violence, universal plans which have a minor impact on many families would eventually reduce the number of families with severe problems.

Many womens' issues deal with the financial independence of women, especially women who are raising small children either without a husband or with a husband who is not supportive in a variety of ways. The general public usually overlooks the criminogenic aspects of family situations which are the product of this lack of resources in the hands of women. By simply providing the means to move away, a number of situations conducive to violence might be altered.

It is possible that some of these changes are already occuring in North America. When Straus and Gelles (1986) reported a *decrease* in child abuse and wife abuse between 1975 and 1985, there was a mixed response from official agencies who claimed that they had been receiving an *increase* in cases of this nature. The survey results did not coincide with the experience of many agencies. One possible interpretation is that a broad based social concern leading to a variety of programs could have an impact. Such programs might make women seek help instead of enduring beatings. This could lead to more contact with agencies *and* a decrease in actual beatings. This should not be used as an excuse for complacency. Rather, it suggests that when a society mobilizes, there is the possibility of a positive impact. That principle could be generalized to broad based programs that make seemingly modest contributions to the quality of family life for many families in addition to the type of intervention that takes place for those few who are clearly identified as having problems. Much of this help could be provided by modest changes in legislation, in the way we deliver legal services, and in the support systems in social services and education. It may also reduce violent crime in the next generation.

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